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# ORATION

BY

HON. S. S. HARDING,

CHIEF JUSTICE OF COLORADO.

DELIVERED AT THE

DENVER THEATRE, IN THE CITY OF DENVER.

February 23d. 1864.

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

COMMITTEE ROOMS FOR THE 22ND OF FEB. CELEBRATION, }  
DENVER CITY, February 5, 1864. }

*Hon. S. S. Harding, Chief Justice, &c. :*

DEAR SIR :—The Union men of Denver propose to celebrate the approaching anniversary of the birth of Washington, by appropriate commemorative exercises. I am requested by the committee of arrangements to invite you to deliver an oration upon that occasion.

Trusting that your arrangements may be such as to enable you to give us those counsels and reflections which the occasion and the MAN suggest.

I have the honor to remain,

Respectfully yours,

HENRY C. LEACH,

Ch'n Com. Ar.

REPLY.

DENVER, COL. TER. Feb. 5, 1864.

*Henry C. Leach, Chairman, &c.*

DEAR SIR :—Your kind and flattering note of this date, inviting me on behalf of a committee of the Union League, to deliver an address on the occasion of the approaching anniversary of the birthday of WASHINGTON, has been received, and I take this opportunity to thank you for the same. With many doubts as to my ability to do justice on the occasion to which you refer, yet I have concluded to accept your kind invitation, and will endeavor to respond to the same.

I am, your obedient servant,

S. S. HARDING.

It would seem, Mr. President, that on this occasion there might have remained little else to be done than the reading of the Farewell Address of the Father of his Country. But as such is not the programme laid down, I make my appearance before you, with much diffidence, unprepared as I am with any thing worthy of so great an occasion, and the intelligent audience that surrounds me.

The name of Washington is known in all climes where the human race has emerged from a state of barbarism. Whenever that name is pronounced, whether on land or sea, by the peasant at his toil or the sceptered monarch on his throne, it is with veneration that only belongs to the greatest benefactors of our race, who have spent their lives in the cause of liberty and human progress.

The history of the world is but little else than a compilation of the acts and opinions of men, who have stamped the eras in which they have lived with glory or shame. And yet when we turn over the record of the mighty past, and consider that not one name in a million of all the myriads of earth, has been transmitted to the third generation that has come after it, we find but little indeed to pamper our vanity, or pride of self esteem, unless we found our hopes on something more enduring than mere earthly glory and fame. The student of history can mention a few score names of the representative men of the past which have come down to us, but as we explore the river of time, long before we reach the source of that mysterious flood we grope our way in darkness, and stand gazing into the dim unknown with hesitation and doubt, if not with superstitious fear.

As each people have arisen to nationality and power, there have been carried along with their rise, culmination and fall, the controlling ideas which entered into their social and political organization, and upon which depended their fate as a nation. The ultimate destiny which has ever awaited a people, has been determined by the moral forces which have been nurtured in the heart of the nation itself, no matter whether it be found in the breast of a single ruler, or in the masses



of its constituent members—and in the same proportion as these forces have been made to harmonize with the moral law of the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, (no matter by what name that Almighty Power may have been called), so have all governments become steadfast and enduring, or, on the contrary, as this law has been violated their dangers have increased on every hand. I appeal to the history of the world, to the history of man in all of his relations in life, for the truth of this proposition. It is so manifest, that it may be set down as an axiom. The opinions and ideas of the living generations of men, are founded, to a great extent, on the opinions of those who have preceded them, and they, too, in their turn, founded their ideas on the moral and physical phenomena by which they were surrounded. Thus it is that to a certain extent, our opinions and ideas, both in religion and morals, go backward as well as forward, and not only the present, but the past generations of men, are more or less responsible for their inherent qualities, whether they be right or wrong. This would be but a sad picture indeed, if we did not consider that man was a sentient being, progressive in his ideas, capable of analyzing principles, and drawing conclusions from well known premises. He is capable of reasoning from cause to effect, and in the same proportion as light is shed upon his soul, he becomes responsible to God in the given ratio that his judgment has become informed. The eras of light and darkness which have fallen on the nations of the earth may be clearly traced to their superinducing causes, if all the facts were before us on which our minds could act.

Few are the forms of government that have not been introduced amongst men. Monarchies, absolute and constitutional, have been the most common, and seemingly the most steadfast and enduring, and hence their almost universal adoption as the normal condition of society. Political essayists have assented, without contradiction, until a very modern period, that these are the only forms of government which could defy the inherent forces of discontent which are supposed to be ever slumbering in the bosom of society itself.

It must be confessed that these opinions were not without reasons for their adoption.

The history of all Republics is only a history of triumphs and disastrous failures, and after a few decades or centuries at most, the torch of Liberty has become extinguished, and a starless night of despotism has settled on the whole land. The reason is obvious. If we go back to the time of the most famous of all the ancient republics, and study the frame work of their organization, we will find but few of those principles upon which a true and just government is based. These republics were in fact but a species of close corporations, where the rights and attributes of citizens belonged only to the favored few, whilst those who were not citizens, could enjoy none of those rights, which we as a people claim to hold at the hands of no earthly government, but at the hands of our Creator.

Such, indeed, were the famous republics of Greece and Rome. They undoubtedly possessed many of those qualities which develop a high order of civilization, and we must admit that the statesmen and philosophers of those times had made far advancement from the darkness and barbarianism from which they emerged.

And yet with all the light that has beamed through unknown centuries, man has been slow to learn his true relationship to his fellow man or to his Creator. Those who had been taught in the schools of Socrates, Plato and Pythagoras, might well have had some faint glimmerings of this relationship, for these lessons were indeed the evangels of the promised Christ. In the administration of these *quasi* Republics there were exhibited some of the noblest examples of justice and godlike patriotism.

But they were destined to fall from their own inherent weakness, and

"Like the baseless fabric of a vision,  
Leave not a wreck behind."

And why should this have been otherwise? The violation of the laws of nature, whether in the material or moral universe, produces the same phenomena, so far as moral and ma-

terial forces may be compared. On the one hand, convulsions, earthquakes, tempests and lightning, disease and death, and on the other, the demoralization of the masses, an inordinate love of gain that hesitates at no obstacle, ignorance, superstition, hypocrisy, practical atheism, national decay, and finally revolution reaching far down to the very foundation of society itself. Yet notwithstanding these unmistakeable phenomena, Man, in all ages, has been slow to profit by their teachings. Centuries after centuries have passed since the advent of that new and better dispensation, the mission and office of which is to comfort the poor and the lowly, and those who mourn, to open the prison doors, to unloose the heavy burdens, to break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free, before its professed teachers comprehended the universality of its adaptation to all the wants of our natures, as well as to all demands of the highest possible civilization of our race.

Even at this age of the world, in the midst of the light of the nineteenth century, with the logic of history before us, we hesitate to draw conclusions, which are as plain and inevitable as the law of numbers in the solution of the simplest mathematical problem. It was remarked long ago by a christian philosopher, that "the promise of the word of life is to him that doeth the word, and not to him who speaketh it, though he believeth it, and doeth it not." This applies as well to nations as to individuals. It matters therefore but little what fair sentences and phrases of speech may be found in the professions of men, or in individual or national compacts, if these compacts are violated, or such professions are disregarded. Indeed it would add to the enormity of the breach itself, in proportion as the promises were fair and unmistakeable on their face. I might elaborate this idea with many illustrations, but time will not permit.

But what must be the moral guilt of the individual or government that has covenanted, not only with man, but with Almighty God, and that has deliberately sealed the same with his own soul, or the nation's life, for its faithful performance, and afterwards deliberately violated the same. And what is

a nation or government, but an aggregate of men, expressing their will through some constituted medium. Such a government is ours. Such is the wonderful nation to which we belong, known as the United States of America. Composed in the aggregate, not only of millions and millions of freemen, whose decadal increase is without a parallel in the history of our race, but also of States and communities, grander in their social and political relations than any power of the old world, yet subordinate to that grandest of all nationalities, the United States of America.

The history of America, from the landing of its great discoverer down to the present hour, is made up of the most important epochs in the annals of our race. Amongst the greatest of these is that which inaugurated the struggle of our forefathers for National Independence, founded, as it was, on the self-evident truths contained in that Immortal Declaration, which has been transmitted to us. Surrounded by a galaxy of imperishable names, which adorn that period of our history, brighter and more prominent than all others is the name of Washington. It is no disparagement to the noble band of patriots, who sealed with their blood their devotion to the cause of human liberty, or who have left undying evidence of their faith and trust in God, to say that he, whose birthday we now celebrate, was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Mr. President, had the opinions and views of Washington, on the subject of slavery, obtained, in the earlier history of our government, had they been heeded by the masses of his own Virginia at that time, this most wicked of all rebellions would never have darkened the world with its horrors, and our present calamities would never have come upon us. These calamities are only the wages of the sin of Human Slavery. Slavery which in an hour of our national weakness, had found a lodgement in the Constitution itself, in defiance of the great principles upon which that Constitution was founded, and which, like another imp of hell, has turned to devour the very mother whose breasts were filled with milk upon which the



foul fiend may have substituted through all coming time, if God's Laws were not stronger than the laws of men.

Mr. President, had the doctrine contained in the Declaration of Independence been carried out to its logical sequence, had the opinions of Washington, Jefferson, Henry, Madison and other great names of the Virginia of our revolutionary period, been heeded by the delegates of sister colonies, this most wicked of all rebellions would not now threaten to engulf the whole nation; the rivers of blood which are now being shed would never have flowed, and the ghastly hecatombs of our patriotic sons and brothers would not have been piled up on so many bloody fields of fratricidal strife. Virginia, to-day, the home of Washington and Jefferson, and in whose bosom sleeps the sacred ashes of her immortal dead, would not hold in her embrace the foul nest of vipers who seek to sting the nation's life, to destroy the freest government on earth, that slavery may live, that an Empire may be established, founded on human skulls and human slavery.

In referring to our Revolutionary period, it is but just and charitable to remark, that the founders of government lived in times when they were surrounded by old abuses, when men were educated to believe that slavery was a necessity if not a positive right. Yet the the minds of Washington and Jefferson, spurning the teachings of a false theology, looked beyond the question of their own times, and proclaimed that "Liberty is the birthright of all men." To a certain extent, every man is the creature of education and circumstances, and great as Washington was in his moral attributes, yet it could not have been expected of mortal, that his opinions were not modified by the condition of public sentiment on this subject throughout the civilized world. For be it remembered, that at that period no christian power had inhibited the foreign slave trade or declared it a felony on the high seas. The pious Las Cases had proposed, with the seeming approbation of all the christian powers, that the African should be substituted for the Indian as a slave, and thereby hoped to convert to christianity, through the merits of bondage, the heathen tribes, of



that ill-starred land of the sun. Such was the condition of public sentiment throughout all christendom, on the subject of slavery, when the great Charter of Freedom was proclaimed on the 4th of July, 1776.

Yet notwithstanding this moral darkness which had fallen on the nations of the earth, you may search in vain for one word that ever fell from the lips or pen of Washington that justifies human slavery. He was the owner of slaves, to be sure, but only such as came to him by inheritance from his ancestors, and he closed his great life by giving a sublime and godlike example to his countrymen in emancipating every slave on his estate, and conferring upon them, as far was in his power, the boon of freedom.

His was an intellect that could not be chained by the fetters which bigotry imposes on her votaries. No matter what may have been the conclusions of other men, drawn from false premises, he, as by an intuitive sense of what was right, soared above the narrow prejudices of his age, and at a single bound placed his feet on the eternal rock of truth. In matters of religion he was not a strict conformist of his times, and in many things he may have been considered unorthodox. Yet he was a firm believer in all those great principles which underlie the faith of the christian. He believed in all of those principles which give courage and hope to the good of all ages, and whilst he spurned the narrow creeds of the bigot his great soul, simple and reliant in its faith as the little child whom Jesus took in his arms and blessed, turned from the pride, gratitude and homage of a nation, and prostrated itself at the cross of a risen Redeemer. But it is principally as a statesman and patriot that his character challenges our love and veneration. It would seem that Nature had gathered up all the great qualities which had appeared in the different persons of all ages, who have left their names on the scroll of fame, and concentrated them all in his singular character.

If he was great like Cæsar, he possessed his greatness without his ambition. If he was as unpretending in his manners as Fabius or Cincinnatus, he possessed their simplicity

with a personal dignity unknown to them. His stern love of justice would have challenged the admiration of the first Brutus, and his lofty and godlike patriotism the veneration and homage of the second. Yet there was no cruelty in his nature, nor ingratitude in his heart. He stood in the midst of his compatriot heroes as fixed in his principles as the law of gravitation itself, and no stranger ever approached him, whether on his tedious march, in his military tent, in the chambers of state, or amidst his flocks and herds at his own Mount Vernon, without being more thoroughly impressed with his inherent qualities of greatness.

The old maxim "if you would know how *little* a great man is, ask his footman or valet," did not apply to him, for fewer weaknesses belonged to him than to almost any other mortal, in all the ages which have come down to us. Such was the 'Father of his Country.' Who would attempt or dare to draw a comparison between him, as the great leader of our war of Independence against the hostile legions of the mother country, and the perjured traitors, who, as if by the retributive laws of God, are now permitted to head the armies fighting in the cause of treason, and which are laying waste with fire and sword, not only Virginia, the home of Washington, but every southern State which contains in her bosom the poison of slavery, which has stimulated this national death. Did I say national death? No, no, I do not mean that, although this war was intended as such, for under God it shall prove the resurrection and the life of this nation. "The wrath and folly of man shall praise God, and the remainder He will restrain."

But to return. It has sometimes been said that if the American Revolution had proved a failure, that the name of Washington would only have been known as that of an execrated traitor made prominent only from the fact that he was a rebel chieftain. Such is not the fact. We have all cotemporary history to assure us of the contrary. Throughout the entire mother country with her dependencies, from the humblest cottage of the peasant to the chamber of royalty itself,

his qualities of heart would have challenged the respect and admiration of even his accusers, and if in the stern execution of public law he had been made to suffer as the political Messiah, yet his blood would have consecrated the scaffold and the block, and washed out every stain upon his moral character as a man.

If there is an admirer of the present head leader of this rebellion, whose hands are dripping with the blood of fratricidal murder, and whose soul is blackened with perjury too deep to be forgiven short of the infinite mercies of God, let him not flatter himself that his "model hero," when history shall pronounce its inexorable judgment, will receive at its bar the credit of having possessed any other qualities than those which adorn the exalted villain.

But I must not detain you longer on this branch of my subject. It remains to be considered whether the patriotic men on this continent, men who believe in the doctrine proclaimed by our fathers, that liberty is the birth-right of all men, will abandon the government and flag of Washington, and succumb to traitors in arms, who are striking at the nation's life. How is that to be done? How is the government to be maintained? There is but one possible way under Heaven, and there should be but one. That is, this nation must "PAY ITS VOWS TO THE MOST HIGH GOD." She must honestly carry out in their logical sequence, the great principles which were held as *self-evident truths*, and which are the key note of the Declaration of Independence itself. This much the signers of that immortal instrument promised, before God, to do—for they appealed to "the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of their intentions, and relying on the protection of Divine Providence, they pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their *sacred honor*."

In all ages of the world, in all countries, and amongst all men, be they civilized or barbarian, a vow made to the living God has ever been looked upon as a sacred thing, not to be violated or disregarded with impunity. If there is an exception to this rule, I have never seen it in the history of any

people. No matter what his faith may be, such an act has been remembered as a consecration of his conscience to that Supreme Power which is supposed to control, not only the actions of men, but of nations.

The Bible itself is full of these examples, sometimes fraught with a cruelty shocking to our senses, and which seems only to confirm the obligation on the soul of him who has made his "vow before the Lord."

"If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall do all that proceedeth from his mouth, thus saith the Lord."

Mr. President, fellow citizens, did our forefathers vow "a vow unto the Lord" which has not been performed? did they "take an obligation on their souls which bound them as with a bond," and for the performance of which they pledged the nation's life? If so, it is not strange that we have lived to see such times as have fallen to our lot. Never before, in the history of the world, was a more solemn vow made unto the Lord, "the Supreme Judge of the world," than that made by our fathers, as they arose from their supplicating knees, with that baptismal vow fresh upon their lips. Appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of their intentions, and, "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence," they proclaimed these principles, which they declared to be so plain, that they were "self-evident truths" upon which they founded our government.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, amongst which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Mr. President, ladies, gentlemen, do we believe to-day in that declaration of our forefathers? and if so, do we also believe in a superintending Providence? Are we professed christians in our belief and doctrine, and atheistical in our practices? If that is so, the fault is only aggravated in as much as we add the sin of hypocrisy to a violated obligation.

That was at a time when our forefathers felt that the shackles of slavery were being placed on their own limbs;



but inspired by the free atmosphere of this new world, and contemplating the majestic phenomena of mountain, forest, river, and, ocean with its eternal hymn, and "looking up through Nature to Nature's God," caught the inspiration of Liberty which for ages had dwelt in caves and dungeons.

Under this inspiration the immortal Declaration was written, and the nation's "vow" deliberately made to the most high God. It was here that the nation's life was pledged to the "Supreme Judge of the world" for its faithful performance, and as if prophetic of the future, the first blood that was shed in defence of the principles upon which that Declaration was based, was the blood of a colored patriot at the battle of Lexington.

The self-evident truths contained in that immortal Declaration, were freedom's evangel, and applied alike to all ages and peoples. Centuries are but as days in the life of a nation, as a thousand years is but as a moment in the presence of the Almighty, and no matter what breaks may be placed on the wheel of human progress, no matter how long may seem to us the night of despotism, or how many weary rounds the watchman may travel on his lonely beat, before the star of liberty shall burst on his enraptured vision, yet as God lives, the hour will come and the gospel of a new dispensation and political faith, founded on that Declaration of our fathers, will smite with its avenging rod the last foe to the doctrine of universal liberty of man. Thrones, crowns, and scepters, shall fall before those self-evident truths, as stubble is consumed before the devouring flame.

It is "the still small voice" that fell on the ear of the ancient prophet, and which succeeded the tempest, the thunder and the earthquake. And yet to the shame be it said of certain politicians (I will not call them statesmen) it has been inculcated amongst their followers, that this grand category of truths was not intended to embrace men of all countries and nationalities, but was confined in its application to the people of the colonies, merely, who had arisen in arms against the usurpations of the British Crown. Finally, I believe, that



the rendering of its meaning was so far extended, as to embrace all nationalities represented on this continent, whose votes were sought in the sacred name of democracy to elevate to power the advocate and friend of human slavery! That monstrous perversion of what our fathers called "self-evident truths," made at the behests of the slave powers, to men who knew better, but for the love of office would assert a *lie*, which they never believed, yet who consented to do so that they might catch the votes of the prejudiced and ignorant,

"Is that forbidden fruit whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, with all our woes."

But let us return to the enquiry, did our fathers vow a vow unto the Lord, and if so, has it been performed? Mr. President, that "vow" was made before the Supreme Judge of the world. It was made in an hour of darkness, when the scaffold, the block and the dungeon were in plain view. I have never allowed myself to believe for a moment, that they were not honest and sincere when they published this Declaration to the world. These truths were the fundamental principles upon which our ancestors erected a government which they hoped would endure forever, and which should be to the oppressed of all nations "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

If, on the contrary, I could believe for a moment that [this solemn declaration was made with mental reservations, and only intended to embrace their own condition, then indeed I should not only lose all respect for their patriotism but confidence in the declarations of all men. But I thank God that this foul slander cannot be successfully charged against the noble band of patriots who laid the foundation of our government, on the eternal rock of truth, and cemented it with their blood. All cotemporaneous history places this question beyond a doubt. We have only to refer to the writings of the authors of the Declaration itself, and the cloud of witnesses which history adduces, to prove the facts beyond the power of successful contradiction. Washington and Jefferson themselves, and the great men with whom they were associated in the early history of our government, with but here and there

a solitary exception, lived and died the uncompromising opponents of human slavery. Mr. President, I could occupy much more time in demonstrating this proposition, but it is unnecessary to detain you longer on this branch of my subject.

Time passed on, the generation of patriots disappeared one by one from the stage of life and slept with their fathers. A new generation succeeded, and, for causes to which I shall hereafter allude, no ordinary man, either in Virginia or in any other of the slave-holding states, south of Mason's and Dixon's line, could oppose the wicked and blasphemous pretensions of slavery, without danger of incurring public odium. The independence of the United States had been acknowledged by the haughty power with which we had contended through seven long years of bloody war, on so many battle fields, which had drank the life-blood of our patriotic countrymen.

Peace again returned, and commerce spread her white wings. We gathered up the bones of our fallen heroes, and deposited them in honored graves. Our merchantmen visited every sea and ocean, and our flag became respected in all climes. The invention of the Cotton Gin, by Whitney, and the Steam Engine, by Fulton, gave a new impetus to the planting interests in the slave states; and to navigation on our far-stretching rivers, rolling their resistless floods ever to the sea. Slavery became a question of dollars and cents, and whilst few men dared to assert that it was *right*, the many thought its practice justifiable from necessity. As the memory of our eventful struggle in the war of independence passed away and became fainter and fainter, the voice of God and of conscience was hushed in the hearts of a nation, whose progress in all that constituted material wealth, was without an example in the history of the world. As the great ships swung at easy anchorage, in front of our warehouses and wharves, piled and crammed with the products of slave labor, men of all parties and creeds forgot at the time that each bale and parcel was soddened with the blood and tears of the unpaid bondsmen, and, in their greed for gain, forgot the

nation's "vow" to "the Supreme Judge of the world."

Here and there might be found some great soul who, disdaining wealth and place and power, spoke out against the wrongs of Slavery with a warning voice, who feared not to "scatter the living coals of truth upon the nation's naked heart," but still the myriad spindles whirled in our great factories, and the beating of ten thousand looms drowned the voice of even conscience itself.

Yet there stood the nation's vow, unpaid and uncanceled in the sight of the Eternal One. During all of this time our people were not slow to manifest their appreciation of liberty so far as national emblems and devices were concerned. We wrote Liberty on everything, below, and around us. The great seals of the government and all its departments had Liberty engraved upon them. Our starry flag had that talismanic word beneath the liberty cap of the ideal goddess. It streamed from the beak of the fierce standard bearer of Jove, as it clutched in its talons the sheaf of thunderbolts. Each sovereign State followed the example, and "*Sic Semper Tyrannis*" was the crowning glory and shame of the great mother of Presidents. Not content with this, at our national mint, we stamped "liberty" on gold, silver, and copper, down to the value of half a cent over the head or through the brain of the star-eyed goddess. We forgot, in our folly and madness, that each penny and half penny that went into the hands of the crouching slave was an indictment against us, as a nation, before the bar of God, upon which, sooner or later, we should be brought to trial and judgment.

Was this paying our vows to the most high God? Was this the fulfillment of that obligation which our fathers took upon their souls, and for the fulfillment of which they pledged the nation's life. Oh no, it was a mockery, a solemn and wicked mockery. For though, Mr. President, we may festoon the heavens above us with emblems of liberty—though the green earth beneath our feet may be carpeted with aphorisms of Divine Truth—though we may write Liberty on every blade of grass in the fields, or over these mighty plains around us, and

give a tongue to every leaf in the forest to swell the hymn of Liberty on every passing breeze; yet so long as one innocent human being stands in our midst vainly appealing to us, with uplifted and fettered hands, bought and sold at the will of another who claims to be his *owner* by virtue of public law, it gives the lie direct to all our pretensions and high-sounding moral assertions.

Then came the era of what statesmen and politicians called *conservatism*, but really the worst radicalism for evil. Conservatism was the "*sine qua non*" with all men who hoped for preferment in either church or State. Conservatism laid its mesmeric hand upon the nation's heart, and its pulse ceased to beat only in quick and feverish strokes, as that great heart was fired with the hope of new acquisitions of territory, by conquest or otherwise, for the extension of human slavery.

The sacred desk became polluted by this moral leprosy, and although the reverend Doctors, with gown and surplice, shrank at first from the justification of slavery "*per se*," yet they hesitated not to rack their brains in emasculating the word of God, and in quieting the guilty consciences of their client communicants, by repeating the story of Paul and Onesimus, and of Jacob and his bond servants, *and the number born in his house.*

"Oh shame, where is thy blush?"

Well may we apply the words of the indignant poet:

"Just Allah, what must be thy look,  
When such a wretch before thee stands,  
Turning the pages of thy sacred Book  
With most defiled and blood-stained hands,  
And drawing from its text Divine  
A charter for his blood and crime."

On and on sailed our great ship of State freighted with the hopes of the human race. Here and there close observers had noticed that a bolt had started, a staunchion had given way, or a seam yawned, but cotton had taken the place of *okum*, and she swung out into an unknown sea. The landmarks of the Constitution disappeared one by one, and the headlands, which lay beyond the dangerous shoals and reefs, we beheld with longing eyes, and steered with sealed log, and with chart and compass thrown overboard, for their green



savannahs. The slave power was at the *tiller* and on the quarter deck. Each place, indeed, from hold to round top, was filled with picked men, shipped in their own ports. If there was a single exception to this rule, it could only have been found amongst the *coal heavers* and the *scavengers of the deck*.

Mr. President, unpleasant as it is to recur to these things, yet truth demands that it should be done. God knows that this is a most unpleasant duty for me to perform, but standing here as I do on this occasion, I will not shirk from its full performance. I would much rather, if it were in my power, go backward, like the sons of the ancient patriarch, and throw the mantle of charity over the nakedness and shame of my country, but I have no garment large enough to do that.

Liberty was cloven down in the house of her pretended friends, and justice and judgement and mercy were turned aside in the streets. The sacred guarantees of the constitution, securing to the citizen everywhere under its protection the liberty of speech, the freedom of the press, and the right of conscience, were disregarded by the maddened votaries who knelt at the shrine of the great idol.

The holy temples dedicated to the living God were closed against all such as dared to declare the whole gospel of a crucified Redeemer. The public mails, although transported principally at the expense of the people of the free States, were ruthlessly plundered and violated with impunity at open noon day, by officers sworn to protect them, if not by connivance of government itself, and their contents burned in the presence of the shouting mob, providing these sacred receptacles of business, love and affection of our countrymen, contained a sentiment or paragraph against human slavery.

And pray tell me, why was this violation of all law and order by the slave power, which at that time controlled all departments of the government? There never has been and never will be but one true answer, and that answer is heard in the same voice of the unclean spirit of olden times, when it cried out before the accusing Christ, "why hast thou come to torment us before our time."



They were guilty before God of a heinous sin, which every human being must confess at the bar of his own conscience, if he would square his own acts by that rule which religion and faith in Christ imposes on his followers :

“Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.”

The standard works in our public schools and seminaries, which even by implication condemned human slavery, were either emasculated or wholly forbidden to cross the threshold of a southern schoolroom.

Our great benevolent societies, North and South, with only here and there an exception, and whose ostensible purpose in their organization was the diffusion of christian knowledge to the benighted nations of the earth, and “to preach Christ and Him crucified,” at length paid willing tribute to this unholy power, and with the price of blood in their treasury, established an *index expurgatorius* which made it impossible for a paragraph to be printed in their millions of pages which contained the slightest censure against the great national sin.

This was the culmination of that guilty power which at last dared to raise its blood-stained hand against the nation’s life. Indeed in this it would seem that judicial blindness had fallen on the whole land.

“Whom the gods intend to destroy they first make mad.” Each generation had produced some mighty name whose province it was to give tone to public sentiment. But no matter what may have been his early education, no matter on what spot his infant feet may have first pressed his mother earth, or his young eyes had opened on the blue heavens, still this same power, by its infernal magic, could turn him from his path of duty and finally mould him to its imperious will.

Need I stop here and stain my manuscript with my very tears—for alas, when I remember the names of those who have fallen, shorn of their godlike strength of intellectual power for good, and made to kneel at the polluted shrine of this foul Idol, I might well exclaim, in the language of the

old Roman, "Friends, countrymen and lovers, if you have tears prepare to shed them now."

Alas, alas, there comes one from out that shadowy throng with the same look of sadness that was on his brow when he saw his betrayal, and sick of life and the world, "he went home to die by the sounding sea."

Godlike mortal ! thou who hast put on immortality, pardon, oh pardon, if this shall be a desecration of thy memory. At a time like this it is my duty, if need be, to call back the very dead for my witnesses. Do you remember that speech "under an October sun?" Do you remember the 7th of March in the Senate of the United States? It was the Ides of March to him—when the greatest intellect that has ever adorned the forum or the halls of Congress was prostituted to the task of apologizing for slavery, and justifying its extension over vast tracts of free territory, in view of the nomination to the Presidency at the hands of the slave power. Here it was, that the great defender of the constitution appeared as the hired attorney of his imperious clients, without even securing a retainer, and this too, when in his earlier manhood he had lashed, with his indignant and unsurpassed eloquence, the infernal wrongs of the very system, which, in his ripened manhood, he feared to condemn.

If such an one, on whose noble brow

"The very gods had set their seals  
To give the world assurance of a man,"

was not able to withstand the seductive charms and the wiles of the tempter, what need we have hoped from that mighty swarm of sycophants and office-seekers, who were ever ready, for the hope of place, to prostrate themselves at the feet of the foul idol.

Mr. President, I drop the curtain on this most painful of all pictures of disappointed ambition. Indeed

"What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue."

Well might this greatest of all living men, as the light faded from his vision, repeat in tones modulated for his last adieu to earth :

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herds wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness, and to me."

Sleep, thou honored dead, in thy quiet grave. Thou hearest not the storm of battle, nor feelest the earthquake tread of contending armies—and yet, strange that one so gifted as thou wert, did not see, with clearer vision, the approaching conflict between ideas and systems which can never be reconciled, and above all, that thou didst not remember that the "nation's vow," so long recorded in the chancery of God, had not been paid.

And yet, candidate after candidate for the purple robes of the Presidency entered the *arena*, and, after a brief hour, was thrust aside, or thrown into the great spoilarium, where the maimed political gladiators were neglected to die without *shriving* or absolution.

In the meantime, State after State had been added to the great Republic which had refused to pay its "vows to the most high God." The six hundred thousand slaves had swelled, through each decadal census, until they reached four millions. Free territory had been conquered from a feeble and distracted sister Republic, for no other purpose than the extension of human slavery. No matter how this result may have been averted, yet any well informed mind knows that such was the intention.

In the national capital, in the very presence of the bronze statue of the author of the Declaration of Independence, with that immortal scroll still grasped in his bloodless hand, slave prisons and baracoons were erected, so loathsome in their appointments, so shocking to humanity, that the very Turk would have cast them down to their foundation stones for the glory of God.

Families and kindreds once honorable, and dating back to the earlier and better days of the Republic, quit planting tobacco and corn, and, without figure of speech, planted the negro instead. The harvest was not only profitable but bountiful, and Virginia, the home of Washington, with "*Sic semper*

*tyrannis*" for her motto, boasted that in a single year she had sold for the southern market, *thirty-seven millions of dollars worth* of her own children! During all of this harvest of crime the slave breeders of Virginia might have heard that voice of warning, from beneath the marble slab at Monticello, "I tremble for my country when I consider that God is just, and that his justice will not sleep forever."

The whole nation had not only denied the faith of our revolutionary fathers, but of God and His Christ. Powerful denominations, consisting of the various religious sects, entered with eagerness the arena of public disquisition, and vied with each other in proving that slavery is not merely a necessity but is right in principle. The Methodist Church South, a branch of that church which had been built up under the teachings of Wesley, Whitfield and others, changed its severe moral discipline, and made slaveholding not merely *honest* but consistent with christian character and fellowship, and this, too, in the face and teeth of the testimony of its great founder, that "Slavery is the sum of all villanies." They were not alone in the desecration of the religion of Him who came to "comfort the poor and the lowly, to open the prison doors to those that were bound." Yet the God of the oppressed withheld his red right hand. The bondsman cried out from the burning fields of his unpaid toil, and from his prison house, "oh Lord, how long?" and still the muttering thunders were hushed, the threatening clouds that lowered in the southern horizon, charged with their vengeful lightnings, were commanded back to their silent caves, to be marshaled forth in God's own time. The very government itself was organized on the single idea that there were no other rights to be maintained than those claimed by slavery, under a perverted constitution.

No man could hope to reach the Presidential chair, north of Mason's and Dixon's line, unless he was the supplest tool and the meanest of all slaves. "A northern man with southern principles."

In all the courts of Europe, in the national Congress, on



the Supreme Bench, in the army and navy, slavery had her representative men, and with scorn and insolence denied preferment to all others.

During all this time, step after step was taken to make the condition of the slave even more hopeless, to drive from his soul every longing of his immortal nature—to teach him that he was not a man but a *mere brute*, who had been fashioned with human hands, and with the gift of speech merely for the convenience of his master. Then came the fugitive slave law, whose paternity and authorship are clearly traceable to that delectable Virginia Senator, who to-day, is fugitive himself, a traitor and outlaw from his native land, whining and blustering at the courts of European Monarchies seeking aid and comfort in his attempt to overthrow the government of Washington. I need not remind you here of the monstrous provisions of that most disgraceful of all statutes that ever stained the honor of a Christian nation. Contemporaneous history informs us that it was drawn up with little or no hope that its infernal provisions would be allowed to stand, but, on the contrary, would be rejected by northern votes, whereby a pretext would be furnished, at that time, for a southern movement having for its object the same ends as the present rebellion. But in this Mr. Mason and his counsellors were disappointed—they had not yet fathomed the depth of degradation to which their northern political servitors had consented to plunge, and the odious bill became a law, which still disgraces our statute book.

Subsequently to this the two great political parties, both dependent for success on the support of the slave power, met in quadrennial convention, not to pay the nation's "vow to the most high God," but to bow their heads in the dust before their imperious masters. The great democratic party, whose very name appealed to the confidence of men who had fled from the despotisms of the Old World to seek liberty and happiness under our starry flag—that party which claimed to be the party of progress—stultified itself by declaring that the fugitive slave law was a *finality*; and declaring further, as a party



measure, that "all discussion and agitation of the slavery question *in Congress* was thereafter to be condemned." That, it would seem, was bidding high for the blandishments and smiles of their southern masters, but they seemed to have forgotten that in less than "one little month" their political rivals were to meet for the same purpose as that which called them together.

This great party, which for more than a quarter of a century had numbered amongst its members not only the demi-gods whose watch-words were "banks, tariffs and American systems," but also the temperate, the moral, the religious, and the intelligent masses, met and adjourned for the last time. Thus constituted, and wiser than their generation, their great leaders thought to bid higher for the glittering prize than even their political opponents. They had, at least a chance for the "*second shot*" at the political target, and might well take advantage "of wind and sunshine." And pray, sir, what did they do? They had seen not a month before the great democratic party, like beasts of burden, going, as it were, on all fours, in couples, as it is said the "living things" entered into the ark, ready to have laid on their submissive backs whatsoever might be offered, no matter what, whether a live or a dead "nigger." But the last convention of the great whig party met and adjourned. They not only approached the presence of the grim idol on all fours, but they absolutely crawled on their very bellies, in the dust; as one by one they laid *their* offerings at the feet of the slave power, and they resolved, as a party measure, that from thenceforward they would "discountenance the agitation and discussion of the slavery question, *either in Congress or out of it!*" This was "the last ounce that broke the camel's back," and the star of the hero of Lundy's Lane paled before the hero of some nameless ditch in Mexico.

Then came the repeal of the Missouri compromise, and the Kansas troubles growing out of the same, with all of their ghastly horrors, of murder and rapine, where "the soul that is marching on" was educated in the school of Providence;—then the Dred Scott decision, a case founded on a man of

straw, cut and dried for the occasion, where it was solemnly announced, from the highest judicial tribunal known to the government, that "under the constitution of the United States the descendants of African slaves can possess no rights that a white man is bound to respect." And here again, as if madness ruled the hour, the great democratic party of this "free republic," still willing to swear to whatever might be demanded of them at the hands of slavery, incorporated *that decision* into their party creed as a part of their political faith. Mr. Buchanan, the mere tool and creature of slavery, was in the Presidential chair. He was surrounded by a cabinet dictated by slavery. These constitutional advisers of the President, who had solemnly sworn to support the constitution of the United States, were engaged nightly in secret cabals, plotting treason against the government, from whose treasury they drew their daily bread. Honest men at last fled from the presence of these perjured villains, and "the poor old man," the deluded and demented victim of his unholy ambition, was left to the "vulture and the rock."

Then came on another quadrennial election, when the free-men of America, through the forms of the constitution, chose their Chief Magistrate for the ensuing four years. Mr. Lincoln was voted for mainly by men who were opposed to the *extension* of slavery, but the great mass of his supporters were willing to let slavery remain in the states where it then existed, *in statu quo*, as a sacred thing under the constitution. But before the time approached for the inauguration of the new President, there came booming over the far-off waters of the south the roar of hostile cannon, pointed by rebel hands against the flag of our country. Then it was that the sleeping thunderbolts so long laid up in the magazine of heaven were called forth, for the cup of our iniquity as a nation was full. But preparations for the inauguration of the new President went on. That distinguished and honored citizen had left his quiet home in one of the great free states, amidst the prayers and benedictions of an honest and confiding people, only to make his way to the capital of the nation, through a slave-

holding city and state, in disguise—really a fugitive—to take upon himself the solemn obligations incident to his high trust. His conservative friends boasted that his first official act was the enforcement of the fugitive slave law with a rigor unknown to his *illustrious* predecessor. This was doubtless done with most patriotic intentions, but it was “too late.” God’s fiat had gone forth—“the pale horse and his rider” were summoned, “and unto him was given the keys of the bottomless pit.”

But I must pass on. I have no time, Mr. President, to say all that should be said in this connection, and of necessity these poor words of mine must be most incoherent. The nation had become drunk as with the blood of the slave. We turned a deaf ear not only to the voice of history, but to the voice of God. “Wo unto him who buildeth his house with unrighteousness, and his chambers with wrong; that giveth not to his laborers their hire”—“Pay thy vows to the most high God”—were no longer words of solemn injunction and warning to us. We had forgotten that the genius of ruin is ever stalking side by side with every false principle of government, holding aloft her darkened urn, from which she scatters the ashes of death.

Then came the extra session of Congress, where, in sight of the gleaming of rebel bayonets, and almost in hearing of the “flap” of the rebel flag that defiantly flaunted in the morning breeze, it was then and there resolved that the federal government had no intention or desire to interfere with the relation of master and slave; and this, too, when there was not a man or woman in the nation who did not know that it was slavery that pointed every gun and loaded every cannon in this war of unparalleled infamy, for the destruction of the government founded by Washington and his immortal compatriots. And yet, the nation had not been thoroughly aroused from her slumbers of death. Many leading men, both in and out of Congress—yes, in the cabinet itself—seemed more anxious that slavery should escape injury than that the rebellion should be put down.

And still, day after day and month after month hecatombs



of our patriotic sons and brothers were piled up on each disastrous battle-field. Men stood aghast at this seeming, useless sacrifice of human life. At the end of the first year the contending armies stood almost *in statu quo*, only with skeleton regiments, divisions and army corps, which had been decimated of the brave men who but a short time before had left their homes at their country's call, full of health, life, and hope.— Our very commanders in the field, at the head of armies that went forth to fight the battles of freedom in the heart of a rebel country, were instructed to be very careful not to give offence to the *quasi traitors* who remained at home to watch their slaves, instead of going at once over to the rebel flag, around which, in their secret hearts, all of their sympathies and hopes clustered. The fleeing bondman, who sought protection under the flag of the Union, and who offered to *work or to fight without pay*, was told in jeering accents that “this was a white man's fight,” and that *niggers* had no business to meddle in it.” Oftentimes he was rudely repulsed from within our lines, and told to go back and work for his rebel master! In the mean time, one of our chief commanders, (since retired to civil life, and a favorite candidate for the Presidency of all such patriots as desire the restoration of “*the Union as it was, and the constitution as it is*,”) in a printed proclamation assured the armed rebels, against whom he had been sent to fight, that they need have no concern whatever about a *servile insurrection*, for if this should be attempted, the muzzles of his muskets, in the hands of Union soldiers, should first be pointed at the *rebel* slave, and to his rebel master afterwards!

Mr. President, wonderful, marvelous as these things may appear to those who may come after us, yet I have not made a statement that the truth of history will not vindicate. And equally as marvelous, we live at this hour in the midst of men, who seem to be sane on all other subjects, who to-day, if it were possible, would abandon this war for human liberty, and human nature itself, and be content with such a peace as might be dictated by rebels with arms in their hands. Suppose for an instant that such should be the case, that the



independence of the rebel government should be acknowledged, or that the old regime should again be restored, with "the Union as it was and the Constitution as it is"—that slavery should again be reinstated, with all of its blasphemous pretensions, and with additional safeguards—that the same fields made red with the blood of our sons and brothers, should again be cultivated by the crouching slave, beneath the lash of his taskmaster. Ye Gods, what a thought! Each horrid skull as it was turned up to the light of day, by the plow in the hands of the slave, would look up accusingly to heaven, with its ghastly, eyeless-sockets, and the spirit of the departed would come shrieking on the viewless winds, to curse us for our perfidy and cowardice. The blood on an hundred battle-fields would cry out for vengeance against us; and the Genius of Liberty would visit our land only to smite it with her sword of flame.

In the name of our fallen heroes, let not such an inheritance fall to my children, or my children's children. Far better that chaos should come again, than that such an example should be set before the struggling nations. But such can never be the case. Such a peace is not within the range of possibilities. It can no more be done, than man can make a new heaven and a new earth.

Mr. President, such is the dread indictment which I have pressed against my country, and the slave power which has involved our nation in this fratricidal strife. Both are now upon their trial; verily they are guilty before God, and the only hope of our country, is to ask mercy and forgiveness at His hands.

Reluctantly but surely, our whole people, whether in the loyal or rebel states, are beginning to comprehend the solemn truth, that we, as a nation, must "pay our vows to the most high God." The Proclamation of Freedom of January 1st, 1863, was the first installment, but that will not satisfy the demand.

"If a man voweth a vow before the Lord, or taketh an obligation on his soul, that bindeth it as with a bond, he shall

do all that proceedeth from his mouth," "thus saith the Lord." And what must have been the extent of that judicial blindness, that moral darkness, that had fallen on this nation, when we consider that we have been goaded on to the only ark of our political safety, emancipation, step by step, as if before the bayonets of our enemies.

"The mills of God grind slowly but they grind well."

From the date of that Proclamation of Freedom, the political heaven began to brighten, and the clouds that lowered so darkly in our horizon, to show their "silver lining." And why should this not be so, are we infidel to God and his eternal laws? or that He is unmindful of the affairs of men.

Mr. President, I rejoice in the belief that the disposition of this question of slavery, has passed from mortal hands, into those of the Eternal One. "Prepare ye the way and make my paths straight," is no longer the voice "of one crying in the wilderness," but it is heard on every wind that comes leaping over your mountains, or roaming through their rocky cañons. It is a ceaseless voice, that is crying out to the soldier on his weary march, amidst the roar of the battle-field, in his tent, as he sits by his camp fire, or on his perilous duty, as he makes his lonely beat, with no witnesses but the myriad eyes of God, that look down on him from the midnight heavens; everywhere in the midst of civil life, at the fireside, at the table where also are so many vacant seats, in the shop, in the field, in the factory amidst the crash and whirl of ten thousand wheels, in the closet, the drawing room, the stirring assembly, the great marts of trade, the halls of Congress, at the counters of the *money changers*, where stocks go up and down and gold bears a premium of "52 per cent," still that voice is heard "Prepare the way and make my paths straight." "Pay thy vows unto the most high God."

When we, as a nation, shall have performed these sacred duties, when we have paid this vow of our fathers, made in the presence of the superior Judge of the world, peace will again return to our bleeding country, and not till then. The union of our fathers, the only ark of our safety, will then endure

forever, for it will be cemented anew with the blood of our patriotic countrymen. These discordant states and communities with institutions and laws which can never be reconciled, will then have become homogeneous, and we, in fact, will become one people, and one country, with a purer religion and a more exalted patriotism. Our ruined towns and cities will again spring forth, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of their desolation, and our desolated fields, uncultivated, with the plow left rotting in the furrow, will again be crowned with golden harvests and rustling sheaves. Our great ship of state, which now lies dismantled in the trough of the storm-tossed sea, with gory decks, slippery with the blood of patriots, will then once more right up, and, mounting the highest wave, with penants flying, will not only be the mistress of the ocean, but of this mighty continent. Then, indeed, "the morning stars may again sing together, and all the sons of God may shout for joy," for a mighty nation will have been "redeemed, regenerated and disenthralled, by the genius of universal emancipation." Men of future generations will look back with a shudder at the dangers through which we are now passing, but they will bless and venerate our memories, and thank us, in the name of humanity, that we had the courage and the will to stand by the flag of our fathers, and to pay the nation's "vow unto the most high God."

Let us, fellow citizens, perform the duties that now devolve on us—duties that we sacredly owe to ourselves, our God, and our country—and a thousand years hence, when our names shall be stricken from the records of the mighty past, and future generations shall celebrate the grandest epoch in the history of the world—the triumph of liberty over human slavery—when a great nation "performed its vows unto the most high God," then that same starry flag—that proudest emblem amongst nations—shall float in triumph over every hill, plain, valley and mountain of this mighty republic,

protecting under its broad and starry folds millions and millions of happy freemen; and still the shout shall go up as "the voice of many waters, as when deep answers unto deep,"

"Forever float that standard sheet;  
Where breathes the foe but falls before us,  
With freedom's soil beneath our feet,  
And freedom's banner streaming o'er us?"



# CELEBRATION

*Of the 22d of February, 1864,*

BY THE

## UNION LEAGUE

OF DENVER,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE

## SANITARY COMMISSION.

EXERCISES AT THE DENVER THEATRE.

Introductory Address, by SIMEON WHITELEY, President of Denver Council.

Prayer by Rev. GEO. C. BETTS.

Reading of Washington's Farewell Address, by HENRY C. LEACH.

Oration by Hon. S. S. HARDING, Chief Justice of Colorado.

The exercises were interspersed with music by the band of the First Cavalry of Colorado, and

Patriotic Songs, by Capt. W. D. McLAIN.

The entire audience took the oath of allegiance to the United States government.

At the close of the oration Mr. LEACH offered the following resolution, which was adopted unanimously :

*Resolved*, That the thanks of this audience are hereby tendered to Hon. S. S. HARDING, for his able, eloquent and patriotic address, and that a copy of the same be requested for publication.

Hon. GEO. W. LANE moved that the thanks of the citizens of Denver be returned to the committee of arrangements for the admirable entertainment furnished.

GEO. E. CRATER offered a series of resolutions endorsing the administration of ABRAHAM LINCOLN, as wise, honest and patriotic; and recognizing in ABRAHAM LINCOLN the MAN raised up by Providence for the present emergency, cordially recommending his re-election.

The entire audience rose to their feet, and adopted the resolutions, with nine cheers for ABRAHAM LINCOLN, the next President of the United States.

After singing "Rally Round the Flag," the immense audience dispersed.

In the evening a grand ball was given at Blake & Williams' Hall.

The net proceeds of the celebration was ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS, which was forwarded to the Sanitary Commission, New York City.

HENRY C. LEACH,	} Committee of Arrangements.
GEO. E. CRATER,	
CLARENCE J. CLARKE,	
W. D. ANTHONY,	
ELI M. ASHLEY,	









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